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ABSTRACT

To formulate, justify, and establish priorities for high school debate goals, one must consider only those things that debate can uniquely offer to participating students. The most important goal that debate offers is the development of critical thinking. Educators must continue to develop critical thinkers who can anticipate, discover, and prevent abuses from harming individuals and society. A second goal is fostering academic advancement and improvement. The skills students acquire in debate are easily applied to other academic disciplines. Students also learn the value of extensive and intense study of an issue, gaining increased exposure to many different ideas and resources and expanding their intellectual horizons. The third goal is development of communication skills, making students adaptable to many styles and allowing the development of complex argumentation. Three secondary goals, although not as educational in nature as the first three, contain immeasurable social worth and allow forensic educators to promote their activity to interested students. The first is elevated challenges, while the second is exceptional experiences, such as chances to become acquainted with opponents and to travel. The final goal is the training that debate offers for future occupations. To meet all of the above goals, debate educators must recognize and encourage diversity in their programs, while coaches need to place the educational aspects of debate above the competitive aspects, thus protecting the integrity and goals established for debate. (HTH)

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WHAT SHOULD BE THE GOALS OF HIGH SCHOOL DEBATE?: AN EXAMINATION AND PRIORIZATION

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Few of us begin a trip without first knowing our destination. Few of us purchase a product without first knowing its properties and expectations for performance. Few of us participate in anything without first formulating goals and objectives. Ironically, we have seemingly participated in, judged, and coached this activity called debate without a clear consensus of what exactly we wished to accomplish with such involvement.

The purpose of this paper is to do just that. Taking goals which others have deemed to be an integral part of debate, this paper will prioritize these goals. The paper will also offer justification for such prioritization. Through such examination and prioritization, discussion can then focus on the present state of the activity and its ability to meet such goals.

SOME INITIAL CONCERNS

Before an examination of prioritization of goals can be begun, some initial concerns must be met and expressed. First, all goals are important. Granted, some are more important than others. However, to claim that one has an educational and worthwhile forensics program, one must meet all goals, not just some.

No first affirmative is deemed prima facie unless it considers all of the recognized stock issues. To ignore one renders the first affirmative illegitimate and not fit for consideration by the debate judge. The same can be said of debate and forensic programs. One must consider and meet all goals to have a valid and educational forensics program.

Secondly, the goals identified are by no means a complete list. This concept may seem to contradict the previous paragraph. What will be discussed are those goals that seem to be identified by a consensus of forensic scholars. Examining debate textbooks and publications on the subject reveals a repititive list of goals and purposes for the

forensics program. This paper examines those most repeated, discussed, and prioritized.

Finally, this paper offers justification for this particular prioritization. Other scholars may disagree. The resolution of this argument is as important as is the discussion itself. The recognition of differences and similarities between programs is an issue we all must address. The final parts of this paper will address these concepts. We will not all agree. We must, however, as Blair Lybbert wrote, "seek some consensus concerning the many troubling issues confronting interscholastic debate."[1]

AN EXAMINATION OF GOALS

The initial charge of this paper was to respond to identified goals for debate and prioritize those goals. Blair Lybbert's examination and identification of goals was an excellent one. Lybbert established primary and secondary goals, justifying the importance of each. Lybbert also seemed to prioritize some unintentionally. That prioritization will now be extended upon and justified.

Lybbert first justified the need to identify goals. He accurately stated that much of our conflict arises from the assumption that we have not only recognized the same goals, but have also placed the same importance upon them. This assumption may then lead to criticism of the activity. This criticism can be deemed to be invalid because the activity is making little or no attempt to meet that goal. It becomes important then to identify and prioritize goals to facilitate the formulation of effective answers to our critics.[2]

Lybbert then identified those goals inherent to the practice and teaching of debate. Relying not on his own knowledge, but those of other forensic scholars, Lybbert identified a number of goals.[3] He claimed a consensus by identifying and examining three primary goals

found in numerous sources. Those goals include critical thinking and reasoning abilities, academic advancement or development, and communication skills.[4]

Lybbert also identified some secondary goals. Those goals include elevated challenges, providing exceptional experiences, and training advantages for future endeavors. These goals do not have as much importance as other previously identified goals. However, these goals are somewhat unique to debate and exist as a unique justification of the activity.[5]

Lybbert concluded by asking his colleagues to define and discuss these goals further. He asked that we search for some common ground of agreement so that we can indeed identify the goals of high school debate.[6] The remainder of this paper will indeed examine, define, justify, and discuss those goals identified.

PRIORIZATION AND JUSTIFICATION OF PRIMARY GOALS

The first question which must and should be addressed is that of prioritization. Lybbert seemed to suggest that the three primary goals be prioritized in this manner; critical thinking, academic advancement or improvement, and communication skills.[7] Is this means of priorization correct? Are these indeed goals toward which debate reaches? Is debate capable of meeting such goals?

The answer to all of these questions is "yes." This can be claimed by examining the unique characteristics which debate possesses that other activities do not. To formulate, justify, and prioritize goals, one must only consider those things that debate can uniquely offer to those students considering it among a myriad of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. Other activities can build character, develop motor skills and physical coordination, develop artistic appreciation, and offer competition. Debate uniquely offers those

benefits identified by Lybbert and others.

The most important goal that debate offers is the development of critical thinking. Critical thinking can be defined as a process in which the individual attempts to reach a rational decision about a particular problem. The individual does so by examining arguments on both sides of an issue. The individual determines the validity of each argument based upon soundness of logic, empirical support, and objective observation absent extensive personal perception and bias.

No other activity offers as its primary goal the ability to develop critical thinking. The group developing the rationale for forensics at the recent National Developmental Conference on Forensics cited a number of studies calling for the need to develop such skills.[8] The group demonstrated how debate could uniquely meet such a requirement when they wrote:

> "Debate is distinctive because of its dialectical form, providing the opportunity for intellectual clash in the testing of ideas. The creation of an argument is one of the most complex cognitive acts, since it involves research, organizing and analyzing data, recognizing and critiquing different methods of reasoning, synthesizing ideas, understanding the logic of decision making, and communicating complex ideas clearly. The argumentative interaction of students in a debate reflects an even more complex cognitive activity--processing the arguments of others quickly and responding to them by defending or adapting previous positions."[9]

Our society demands that we develop critical thinking. We must develop individuals who can examine complex issues in a precise, objective manner and deliver answers devoid of partianship and prejudice. Issues such as the potential of nuclear warfare, continuing prejudices towards those who do not share our cultural values and philosophies, the fluctuation of our economic and political practices, and the depletion of our natural resources demand our attention. These crises can not be solved without the aid of individuals trained in policy and problem examination and solution.

One can not solve these problems without considering all options. Debate uniquely offers a forum for students to explore possible policy options with little fear of real world ramifications. Students can be taught risk analysis, implementing policies which may lead to serious or catastrophic results. They do so with little real fear of destroying our civilization. Students do learn, however, to consider even the remotest possibilities for catastrophe, weighing whether or not the implementation of such a policy is worth the catastrophe it may create.

If the preceding discussion seems to be a justification for the use of some forms of generic argumentation, it is exactly that. Generic argumentation has been developed to extend debate beyond small discussions based upon small issues. To say that there have been no abuses is to remain extremely naive. Used correctly, however, generic arguments can add much to a debate, especially when developing critical thinking.

Generic arguments force both affirmative and negative debaters to consider previously inconceivable possibilities. Just dismissing a small action as being inconsequential does not eliminate its potentially distrastrous ramifications. One is forced to cope with the argument as an inevitable reality. To avoid such catastrophe, both sides must critically analyze the steps they are to take and determine the validity of the outcome.

The use of generic arguments has prompted much discussion by forensic scholars. Gregg Walker offered guidelines to help both affirmative and negative debaters cope with generic arguments.[10] One of the most important points he made was that the argument is greatly strengthened if the link is case rather than resolutionally centered.[11] Mike Pfau argued that the negative must be allowed some latitude to

argue against increasingly narrow interpretations of the topic. Unlike Walker, Pfau did see some justification in resolutionally focused disadvantages as a way to combat narrow, marginally-topical, and educationally unsound interpretations of the topic.[12] Craig Dudczak viewed generic arguments as a way of coping with information overload, and effectively demonstrated that generic arguments actually fostered creative and critical thinking.[13] These scholars all saw some merit to generic argumentation and their ability to enhance critical thinking.

This discussion may seem to be somewhat inappropriate. It does examine a common practice in present interscholastic debate. Generic arguments are often dismissed as being inappropriate to the forum of debate. Yet, if one is to think critically, one must examine all potential possibilities. Generic arguments and their often large ramifications can be included in those possibilities. To reject them and disallow their correct and proper use seriously denigrates our ability to teach our students to think critically.

We have a need to develop questioning minds. We place an extreme amount of trust in our public officials and corporate managements. As constituents and consumers, we assume that they act in our best interests. Past abuses cause us to cast a jaundiced eye at individuals but such abuses are often forgotten over time. We need to continue to develop critical thinkers to anticipate, discover, and prevent abuses from harming us and the society in which we live.

This examination then leads us into an examination of the second goal. Debate does not foster skills that are only applicable to debate. A second goal can be recognized as that which fosters academic advancement and improvement.

The skills students acquire in debaate are easily applied to other academic disciplines. The ability to think and discus critical issues

easily supplements classroom lecture-discussions. Because of their exposure to complex political, economic, and social issues, debate students can easily transfer that information to classes in political science, government, sociology, and economics. Construction of cases and arguments requires the student to learn good outlining and organizational skills. These skills easily transfer to the writing and construction of term papers, essays, and the study of literature found in many English and communications classes.

Students also learn the value of extensive and intense study of an issue. Students who debate for four years in high school expose themselves to four divergent topics requiring extensive research and understanding. The need to cover a topic completely becomes inherent to any research attempts they must make. Term papers no longer are based upon sources easily found in the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature. Debate students become willing users of government documents and publications, specialized journals, and regional and national publications. Term papers contain thoughtful insight, extreme support, and extensive explanation of thoughts constructed by the student instead of thoughts contained in popular magazines.

A third component of this goal links closely with concepts found in the first goal. Debate students begin to realize that one should not limit their intellectual capacity. Increased exposure to many different ideas expands their intellectual horizons. Previously inconceivable notions become commonplace points of discussion. Debate students are no longer intimidated by complex political, mathematic, scientific, or economic concepts. Intense study and research has taught them that such concepts can be conquered and understood.

The final component of this goal encompasses the process of problem-solving. Many classes require the student to solve problems.

The debate student learns to explore all facets of a problem prior to the suggestion of potential solutions. Debaters learn that to ignore one part of the problem leaves one with an incomplete solution.

Possible impacts of solutions also become realizable. The potential for catastrophic outcomes such as mass starvation, eco-disasters, or nuclear wars are no longer dismissed because of their perceived lack of potential occurence. Instead, such outcomes are treated as grim realities necessary to avoid at all costs. Debate students search for means to avoid such outcomes because they do challenge themselves academically in order to advance and improve.

The final primary goal established for debate should be that of communication skills. Few other issues concerning the present practice of interscholastic debate remain as controversial as this particular goal. Constant argument focuses on the merits of "slow, persuasive" delivery versus the "speed and spread" approach.

Other scholars will discuss this issue in much greater depth. However, since this is a recognized goal of this activity, a discussion of the relative importance of communication skills seems in order. The discussion realizes even greater importance when this goal has been placed at a lower priority than the previously discussed goals.

Why have communication skills been placed third? Aren't communication skills as important as the other goals cited? Can those goals be attained without the use of good communication skills? One can not easily answer the questions.

Let us first consider this scenario. A person is judging two teams in a debate round. One team has proven through the rather extensive reading and presentation of seemingly well-researched documentation that their position is a valid one. Their opponents have not presented as much evidence, but through a great many assertions and

"use of logic" have, in their estimation, answered their opponents' arguments. The second team speaks much less rapidly and more persuasively. For which team would one be inclined to cast a ballot?

Many different answers would abound. The answer, however, must be couched in the true purpose of this activity. Is the necessity to develop critical thinkers more important than producing good speakers? Does less emphasis on delivery and more on information presented enhance critical thinking? Does a slower, more communicative style of delivery necessarily restrict critical thinking?

Many assumptions are made that could be deemed false. First, the amount of evidence one reads does not necessarily enhance the quality of the argument. Second, slow delivery and less presentation of evidence does not render an argument invalid or ridiculous. Conversely, "good speaking skills" can often cover flaws in logic and documentation. Neither of the absolutes is the valid position. There is a great need for us to find a negotiable position located somewhere between these two absolutes.

A necessary goal is to develop communication skills. A great majority of debate scholars agree. However, those communication skills are not easily defined. Abuses can be found in all styles. The goal in communication is not teach just one style, but instead, to make the student as adaptable to as many styles as possible. As J.W. Patterson and David Zarefsky stated:

> "Although we respect and encourage the development of skills required to analyze information, we also encourage the rhetorical goal, which is designed to train the advocate who can influence behavior in a public arena. Even if a critic judge can accept the sloppy use of linguistic, vocal, and bodily skills or delivery, the communication aspects of debate training are likely to be neglected. Audiences in the real world do not present an undifferentiated forum. Some may be knowledgeable on technical issues and respect in-depth argumentation, whereas others may be non-specialists who need more extensive explanation and persuasive appeals. As long as you know in advance what kind of presentation the critic

> desires or even requires in order to understand the issues, your adaption to different types of judging can be an opportunity to practice speaking to all types of audiences. We believe that the goals of academic debate are better served if the debate learns to communicate various forms of arguments in a variety of contexts to a variety of audiences."14

The importance then is not in finding the happy medium between all types of judges. The importance rests in the need to adapt to different audiences at different times. Developing the argument so that it may be delivered and believed by a variety of audiences seems to take precedent over other stated goals.

The goal of delivery of a speech can not be as important as the other two mentioned goals. Other areas of forensics such as extemporaneous speaking, original oratory, impromptu, etc. aid the student in developing good delivery techniques. Some, indeed, offer a much more effective forum for the teaching of such skills. Teaching delivery techniques is not unique to debate. What is unique is the development of argumentation, then making that argument understood by a select, targetted audience.

An argument acquires its validity only after is is understood by the critic judging it. Students must learn, through the use of critical thinking, to adapt the argument to the individual judge. Extensive research, development, and understanding of the argument allows the student to analyze its individual parts to determine which would be most persuasive for this individual judge. Superficial development renders the argument unusable because it can not be adapted Content then takes precedent over the need to communicate.

Decreased emphasis on methodical styles of delivery allows the development of complex argumentation to occur. Students can spend a great deal of time completely researching and building a position with little worry of whether or not its complete content can be delivered within time constraints. When forced to concentrate on perfect posture,

extensive vocal inflection, and mindlessly cute analogies, students superficially develop arguments which lack substantiation and completeness.

The debate becomes a meaningless analysis of superficial issues for which no one can supply complete answers. Allowing a student to speak a little more rapidly than most people, but still concerning him/herself with diction and clarity, aids the participants in developing multiple, complex, understandable and explainable positions. This practice makes for more exciting and interesting debates.

The response may be "For whom?" Critic judges may say that the debates are not exciting or interesting for them. Many debaters, however, would probably disagree. If we are indeed going to teach critical thinking and be concerned about academic improvement, we ought to offer students the greatest challenges available for them. Don't we limit their challenges and experiences by restricting the amount of information they can present in a round of debate?

As critics of argumentation, we must begin to recognize the validity of all styles of communication. Many analogies could be used to demonstrate this necessity. One could be that of the referee in an athletic contest. Many athletic coaches would refuse to have their teams compete in front of referees chosen from fans contained in the crowd gathered to watch the contest. Such fans lack the expertise and knowledge to adequately evaluate and control the action. Our activity has just as many rules and specialized practices. Why then must we constantly ask that those with no knowledge referee the activity?

The debate student must be expected to adapt to many different audiences. Those who are accustomed to fast delivery and extensive argumentation should adapt to those who expect less. Those debate students who use less development and speed should be exposed to

situations where they should have to increase the pace of both. The respect of our peers ought to be given to those teams who can indeed adapt to a variety of audiences.

The role of communication then should be less than that of the development of critical thinking and academic rigor. Content should take precedent over the process of delivering that content. Faules, Rieke, and Rhodes stated as such when they wrote:

> "...[T]here is a need for a reevaluation of priorities. It can no longer be assumed that public speaking is unequivocally the most important goal of forensic programs. Student behavior which results in increased capacity to communicate, persuade, solve problems and make decisions in the less publicized (but no less important) small conferences, negotiations, and interviews is equally important to education."15

We as forensics educators must evaluate what is most educationally and beneficial for our students. We must recognize the three primary goals, and their desireable interdependence. If we are to prioritize, we must realize that the development of critical thinking and academic rigor should take precedent over the development of communication skills.

A CONSIDERATION AND JUSTIFICATION OF SECONDARY GOALS

Lybbert identified three secondary goals for debate which are indeed worthy of consideration. They are presented in no particular order. These goals offer fringe benefits for the debate student. Although not as educational in nature as the three primary goals, these goals contain immeasurable social worth. These goals become good ways for forensic educators to promote and sell their activity to those interested in participating and supporting their forensic programs.

The first goal consists of elevated challenges. Few other activities require the academic rigor that debate offers. Students truly interested in learning and expanding their intellectual capacity can find such an outlet in debate.

A recent educational trend has been the creation of a number of programs for the talented and gifted. Active debate programs fit well into the requirements for such programs. Debate offers challenges not offered by other activities or academic offerings. Participants in Ronald Matlon's and Lucy Keele's study of former NDT participants confirmed such an assertion.[16] Matlon and Keele cited a number of individuals who viewed debate as the most challenging and worthwhile activity in which they participated. They saw debate as a valuable asset when preparing for other classes and occupations.

The second goal considered is the offering of exceptional experiences. Few arenas of competition allow the participant to acquaint themselves with their opponents. Many debaters have the rare advantage of developing two circles of friends. One circle includes those with whom they attend school during the week. On weekends, a second circle includes those persons with whom they share common interests and goals. Few other activities can claim such an advantage.

Many debate programs also allow the student to travel not only in their own states, but also outside of their own geographical area. Exceptional experiences can include exposure to different value and cultural structures, visits to sites of historical significance, and the simple comaraderie of travel companions. Long hours in motor vehicles sometimes foster extensive intellectual discussions and friendships. It is an advantage unique to this activity.

A final aspect of this goal can also be viewed as a detriment. However, it can offer exceptional experiences. That aspect is the participation by a student in a summer debate institute. Friendships with other students from areas throughout the country develop. Previously inaccessible college and high school instructor-coaches offer their expertise and knowledge to benefit possible competitors.

The debate student studies and researches in the finest libraries in the country. Institutes constain flaws, but such flaws can be outweighed by the benefits gained from such experiences.

The final goal attributable to debate is the training that the activity offers for future occupations. Few other activities offer the development of skills transferrable to a myriad of occupations. Many publications have supported this conclusion. Most notably, Matlon and Keele cite a number of individuals who attribute their success to their high school and college debate training.[17] The National Forensic League, on the occasion of the their fiftieth national tournament, published a number of testimonials to the relative merit of debate and forensics.[18] The activity of debate does offer a great deal to those wishing to participate in it.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF GOALS

This paper has outlined a number of goals which can be met by participation in debate. These goals will serve no purpose unless they can indeed be met. This paper offers the following suggestions for the purpose of discussion and debate. They are by no means absolute or complete. It does behoove us, however, to find some way to implement all goals as completely as possible.

First, we must begin to recognize the diversity in our programs. We, as educators, often criticize one another because we administer and practice our programs in different manners. Diversity is viewed as something to be destroyed.

We need, instead, to encourage diversity. Our way of doing things may not be completely correct. We should examine ways to learn from one another. Let us glean benefits from good programs to increase the caliber of education and competition we can offer our students. We, as educators, need to learn to accept the diversity in which this activity

is practiced to offer our students the greatest amount of educational experiences possible.

Coaches need to recognize that they are educators first. Even those with no teaching certificate or position in the school for whom they coach need to assume the role of mentor and model. We need to address the questions of how we can best attain the goals outlined in this paper. Placing importance on the numbers of wins one can attain places the priority in the wrong place. Competition should not be treated as an end, but rather as a means to the end of goal attainment. Concentrating on developing critical thinking, academic rigor, and good communication skills allows the wins to take care of themselves.

We, as coaches, also need to rid ourselves of misconceptions and biases. Matlon and Keele outlined a number of concerns felt by past debate participants.[19] They include some misconceptions about effects and practices. Matlon and Keele conclude that these concerns seem to have no lasting effect.[20]

We need to stop apologizing for this activity. Why make excuses because our students talk more rapidly than the average individual, discuss nuclear war in the same context with judicial reform, or dare to use jargon? Excesses in any direction are not a good thing. Let us concentrate on the benefits of this activity. Let us demonstrate to those outside the activity that some of these practices are necessary to achieve the goals we have outlined. If the means to end can be demonstrated as being valid and devoid of harm, then why should problems exist?

We need to resist attacks from without and within. Coaches and participants often criticize one another because their ways of participation are different. Ironically, all of these individuals are participating for many of the same reasons. All participants need to

publicize and promote the benefits of this activity. All participants need to acknowledge that differences and problems do exist. Acknowledgement bridges differences and allows solutions for problems to be found.

Finally, the educational aspects of the activity need to be placed above the competitive aspect of debate. Wins become hollow victories indeed when gained at the expense of any of the goals outlined. Wins should not be gained when shallow thinking, academic stagnancy, and lack of communication are encouraged. Competition loses its validity when elevated challenges, exceptional experiences, and future training are compromised. Challenging our students to develop complete, critical thoughts, research positions extensively, and be able to communicate those thoughts to a variety of audiences fulfills the educational goals of this activity.

To place emphasis elsewhere renders debate a meaningless and shallow activity. We must do all we can to protect the integrity and goals established for debate. We must continue to dialogue and discuss issues which face us. Forensics scholars must continue to evaluate and prioritize goals established for this activity. This paper should serve as a beginning for such discussion to take place.

NOTES

1 Blair Lybbert, "What Should be the Goals of High School Debate?", paper for the NFL Conference on the State of High School Debate, 1985, p. 1

2 Lybbert, p. 2

3 Lybbert, p. 2-3

4 Lybbert, p. 3

5 Lybbert, p. 4-6

6 Lybbert, p. 6

7 Lybbert, p. 3

8 James H. McBath, "Rationale for Forensics," American Forensics in Perspective, Donn Parson, ed. (Speech Communication Association Annandale, Va.) 1985 p. 10

9 McBath, p. 10-11

10 Gregg Walker, "The Appropriate Use and Inappropriate Abust of Generic Arguments in Competitive Debate," paper presented to the Central States Speech Association convention, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1983

11 Walker, p. 5

12 Michael Pfau, "A Reasonable Approach to Generic Argument," paper presented to the Central States Speech Association convention, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1983

13 Craig Dudczak, "Coping with Information Overload: Generic Argument as the Least Common Denominator," paper presented to the Central States Speech Association convention, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1983

14 J.W. Patterson and David Zarefsky, Contemporary Debate, (Hougton Mifflin Co. Boston) 1983 p. 284

15 Don F. Faules, Richard D. Rieke, and Jack Rhodes, Directing Forensics (Morton Publishing Co. Denver) 1976 p. 48

16 Ronald J. Matlon and Lucy M. Keele, "A Survey of Participants in the National Debate Tournament, 1947-1980," JAFA, Vol. 20, No. 4, p.194-205

17 Matlon and Keele, p. 196-198

18 50 Golden Years: The NFL Nationals, Kenny Barfield, ed. 1980

19 Matlon and Keele, p. 202-205

20 Matlon and Keele, p. 205